

Senior Center Becomes a Pioneer

Center first in state to offer lifelong learning

By MORAG MACLACHLAN

Heading to the opera, analyzing the *New Yorker* or delving into American history could teach a person a thing or two as well as improve his or her quality of life.

Dr. Shirley Oktay of Seabury Point Road said she has read several studies that suggest participation in academic classes helps an individual maintain intellectual capacity, enhance quality of life and ultimately live longer.

"About 20 years ago or so, Duke University built such a community making it a requirement to take academic courses and since then other such communities have been built," Oktay said. "Now it could be that the people who decide to



The Duxbury Senior Center is the home for the newly developed Duxbury Council on Aging Center for Lifelong Learning. The first semester featuring three classes will begin in September.

Barbara Kiley, Bev Walters and Jennifer Reid researched offering classes in Duxbury.

"We found that communities had done what we wanted to do," Kiley said. "There is a senior college in Maine that started offering several classes and now serves five or six communities. This is an opportunity for people who love learning."

"The members of the committee worked wonderfully together," Oktay said. "We started in late 2005. We looked into other programs that had been done and we found that no other senior center in the state was offering academic courses."

The group wanted to obtain input from residents and decided to hand out a survey during town meeting in March. Oktay said nearly 100 residents responded to the survey and listed courses they would be most interested in seeing offered in town. Topics such as women's literature, U.S. history and contemporary classical music were topical favorites among survey participants.

"They seemed enthusiastic about it and that gave us the courage to go forward," Oktay said.

And go forward the committee did with three classes set for this fall. Courses mirror respondents' tastes with classes including A Trip to the Opera, U.S. History 1820-1850 and A Look at Current Events as Reported by the *New Yorker*. Oktay said professors have been secured for most of the classes. She anticipates the opera class incorporating a trip

to the opera. Although that would cost extra, the price to enroll in the classes, which will run between six to eight weeks, is minimal at \$25 a course.

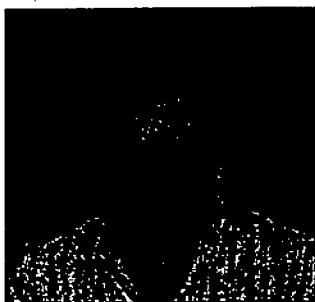
"We're really excited about it and the courses are excellent," Moore said. "It's a great opportunity to take intellectually stimulating courses."

Oktay said the official name of Duxbury's institution is the Duxbury Council on Aging Center for Lifelong Learning. Courses will be open to anyone regardless of age or whether or not they live in town, according to Oktay.

"We were predominately interested in offering classes for seniors, but people in their 40s answered our survey. So, we won't restrict it," Oktay said.

The format for each class is geared toward exposing students to educational issues in a seminar-type setting with some classes like the opera course incorporating both audio and visual materials. "We want to foster an atmosphere for discussion," said Oktay. "There will not be huge amounts of homework, just some reading."

Classes will begin in September and will be offered at the Senior Center on Mayflower Street. Course information will be finalized in August. At that time residents can also register by logging onto the Council on Aging's website or by filling out a form that will be included in the Senior Center's newsletter. Look for an article in an upcoming edition of the *Clipper* for more information on courses, teachers and registration.



Shirley Oktay of Seabury Point Road helped spearhead the lifelong learning center after she read several studies linking intellectual stimulation to improving a person's quality of life.

enroll in these courses were already living healthy lifestyles, but research has shown that intellectual pursuits do seem to improve quality of life."

Oktay, herself, has been seeking a convenient outlet to provide fodder for thought for some time. She said she was frustrated with Harvard's lengthy application process and the amount of driving associated with taking classes at Cape Cod Community College or UMass Boston. Oktay approached the Council on Aging about forming an education committee. With the help of Council on Aging Director Joanne Moore, Oktay and fel-